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Vol. XI, No. 1

Autumn, 1959

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KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

on

Lady Chatterley's Lover



CECIL D. EBY

on

Faulkner and the Southwestern Humorists



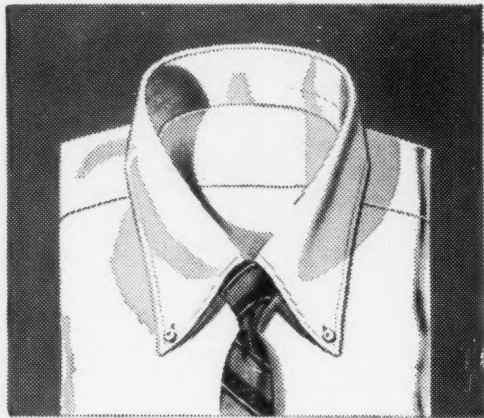
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ERRATUM—Through a typographical error, the front cover of the Spring, 1959, number carried the erroneous designation "Vol. X, No. 2." It should read "Vol. X, No. 3," as is correctly printed on the title page.

Shenandoah

Vol. XI

Autumn, 1959

No. 1

Katherine Anne Porter

A WREATH FOR THE GAMEKEEPER

The dubious crusade is over; anybody can buy the book now, in hardback or paper cover, expurgated or unexpurgated, in drug-stores and railway stations, and 'twas a famous victory for something or other; let's wait and see. In passing let us remark that we may hope this episode in the history of our system of literary censorship will mark the end of one of our curious native customs: calling upon the police and Post Office officials to act as literary critics in addition to all their other heavy duties. It is not right nor humane and I hope this is the end of it; it is enough to drive good men out of those services.

When I first read *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, thirty years ago, I thought it a dreary, sad performance with some passages of unintentional low comedy, one at least simply beyond belief in a book written with such inflamed apostolic solemnity. (I shall return to this later.) And I wondered at all the huzza and hulla-baloo about suppressing it. I realize now there were at least two reasons for it—one, Lawrence himself, who possessed to the last degree the quality of high visibility, and two, the rise to power of a demagoguery of censorship by unparalleled ignoramuses, not only in the arts but in all society. There were organizations and leagues for the suppression of vice, and for the promotion of virtue, and some of these took some very weird and dangerous forms. Prohibition was their major triumph, with its main result of helping organized crime to become big business; but the arts, especially lit-

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER, as Glasgow Visiting Professor at Washington and Lee last spring, inaugurated there an endowed program "to promote the art of expression by pen and tongue." Her novel *Ship of Fools*, is scheduled for publication in 1960.

erature, became the object of a morbid interest to these strange beings who knew nothing about any art, but knew well what they hated.

Being a child of my time, naturally I was to be found protesting. I was all for freedom of speech, of action, of belief, of choice, and all this was to be comprehended in the single perfect right of authors to write anything they chose, with publishers to publish it and booksellers to sell it, and the vast public gloriously at liberty to buy and read it by the tens of thousands.

It was a noble experiment, perhaps, a root idea of freedom of mind and spirit, but in practice it soon showed serious defects and abuses, for the same reason that prohibition of alcohol could not be made to work: gangsters and crooks took over the business of supplying the human demand for intoxication and obscenity—a market that never fails no matter who runs it. It did not take certain publishers long to discover that the one best way to sell a book with “daring” passages in it was to get it banned in Boston, or excluded from the United States mails. Certain authors, not far behind the publishers, discovered that if they could write a book the publisher could advertise as in peril from the censor, all the better. Sure enough, the censor would rise to the bait, crack down, and the alarm would go out to all fellow writers and assorted lovers of liberty that one of the guild was being abused in his basic human rights by those hyenas in Boston or the Post Office, and the wave of publicity was on; and the sales went up. Those were the days when people really turned out and paraded with flags and placards, provocative songs and slogans, inviting arrest and quite often being hauled off to the police station, in triumph, perfectly certain that somebody was going to show up and bail them out before night. Writers—I was always one of them—would sometimes find themselves in the oddest sort of company, people they wouldn’t have let in their houses for anything, defending the strangest things and points of view, being champion for the most awful, wormy little books they would not have given shelf room; and I suppose for a lot of us, this must just be chalked up to Experience. After a good while, I found myself asking, “Why should I defend a worthless book just because it has a few dirty words in it? Let it disappear of itself, and

the sooner the better." No one comes to that state of mind quickly, because it is dangerous ground, but one comes at last. My change of view came with the first publication in 1928 of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

He has become, this lover of Lady Chatterley's, as sinister in his effect on the minds of critics as has Quint himself on the children and the governess, in Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw." I do not know quite what role Lady Chatterley should play to Quint-Mellors; she is not wicked, as Miss Jessel is, she is merely a moral imbecile; she is not intense and imaginative like the governess, she is stupid; and it is useless to go on with the comparison except for this one thing—the air of evil which shrouds both of these books, the sense of a dreary, hopeless situation to which there can be no possible outcome except despair; only the Lawrence book is sadder, because Lawrence was a badly flawed, lesser artist than James, and did not really know what he was doing, or if he did, pretended to be doing something else; and the blood-chilling effect of this anatomy of the activities of the rutting season between two rather dull people comes with all the more force because the relations are not between the vengeful dead and living beings, but between the living themselves, who seem to me deadlier than any ghost.

Yet for the past several months there has been a steady flood of very well-managed publicity in defense of Lawrence's motives and the purity of his novel; and censorship, I am not sorry to say, was loudly defeated at least for the present; and though there were this time no parades, I believe, we have seen such unanimity and solidarity of opinion among American critics as I do not remember to have seen before. And what are we to think of them, falling in with this fraudulent crusade of raising an old tired Cause out of its tomb? For this is no longer just a book, and it never was a work of literature worth all this attention. There is something touching, if misguided, in this fine-spirited, manly chorus in defense of Lawrence's nasty vocabulary and the nobility of his intentions. I do not question either; I only wish to say I think from start to finish he was about as wrong as wrong can be on the whole subject of sex, and that he has written a very laboriously bad book to prove it. The critics who have been

carried away by a generous desire to promote freedom of speech and give a black eye to prudes and nannies overlook, sometimes—and in a work of literature this should not be overlooked, at least not by men whose business it is to write criticism—the fact that purity, nobility of intention, and apostolic fervor are good in themselves at times, but in this case they are simply not enough. Whoever says they are, and tries to settle for them, and to persuade the public to do so, is making a grave mistake, if he means to go on being a critic.

Lawrence began the uproar himself, loudly and bitterly on the defensive as always, throwing out nearly everything he did as if he were an early Christian throwing himself to the lions: "Anybody who calls my novel a dirty, sexual novel is a liar." And further: "It'll infuriate *mean* people; but it will surely soothe decent ones."

The Readers' Subscription, in its brochure offering the book, sets the tone boldly: "Now, at long last, a courageous American publisher is making available the unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—exactly as the author meant it to be seen by the intelligent, sensitive reader." No, this won't quite do. I happen for one to have known quite a number of decent readers, not too unintelligent or insensitive, who have been revolted by it, and I do not propose to sit down under this kind of bullying.

Archibald MacLeish regards the book as "pure" and a work of high literary merit. He has a few reservations as to the whole, with which I heartily agree so far as they go. Yet even Mr. MacLeish begins trailing his coat, daring us at our own risk to deny that the book is "one of the most important works of the century," or "to express an opinion about the literature of the time or about the spiritual history that literature expresses without making his peace one way or another with D. H. Lawrence and with this work."

Without in the least making my peace with D. H. Lawrence or with this work, I wish to say why I disagree profoundly with the above judgments, and also with the following:

Harvey Breit:

The language and the incidents or scenes in question are deeply moving and very beautiful—Lawrence was concerned to reveal how love, how a relationship between a man and a

woman, can be most touching and beautiful, but only if it is uninhibited and total.

This is wildly romantic and does credit to Mr. Breit's feelings, but there can be no such thing as a total relationship between any two human beings, and from some things he wrote and said on the subject, I think Lawrence would have been the first to object even to an attempt at it. He demanded the right to invade anybody, but he was noticeably queasy if anyone took a similar liberty with him.

Edmund Wilson:

The most inspiring book I have seen in a long time . . . one of his best written . . . one of his most vigorous and brilliant . . .

This reminds me that I helped parade with banners in defense of Mr. Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County*, a misguided act of guild loyalty and personal admiration I cannot really regret. But I still prefer *To the Finland Station* and any of Mr. Wilson's criticism and essays on public or literary affairs.

Jacques Barzun:

I have no hesitation in saying that I do not consider Lawrence's novel pornographic.

I agree with this admirably prudent remark, and again when Mr. Barzun notes Lawrence's ruling passion for attempting to reform everything and everybody in sight. My quarrel with the book is that it really is not pornographic—the great wild free-wheeling Spirit of Pornography has here been hitched to a rumbling little domestic cart and trundled off to chapel, its ears pinned back and its mouth washed out with soap.

Mr. Mark Schorer, who contributes the preface, even brings Yeats in to defend this tiresome book—Yeats, bless his memory, who, when he talked bawdy, knew what he was saying and why. He enjoyed the flavor of gamey words on his tongue, he loved good smut in sex, and never deceived himself for one moment as to the true nature of that enjoyment; he never got really interestingly dirty until age had somewhat cooled the ardors of his flesh, thus doubling his pleasure in the thought of it, in the most profane sense. Mr. Schorer reprints part of a letter from Yeats to Mrs. Shakespear:

These two lovers the gamekeeper and his employer's wife each separated from their class by their love and by fate are poignant in their loneliness; the coarse language of the one accepted by both becomes a forlorn poetry, uniting their solitudes, something ancient humble and terrible.

This is a breath of fresh air upon this fetid topic. Mr. Yeats reaches in to the muddlement and brings up the simple facts: the real disaster for the Lady and the Gamekeeper is that they face perpetual exile from their own proper backgrounds. Stale and pointless and unhappy as both of their lives were before, yet now they face, once the sexual furor is past, an utter aimlessness in life it is shocking to think about.

And further, Yeats notes that only one of the lovers uses the coarse language, the other merely accepts it—"a forlorn poetry." The Gamekeeper talks his dirt, and the Lady listens, but never once answers in kind—and if she had, the Gamekeeper would have been scandalized.

Yet the English language needs those words, and they have a definite use and value, and they should not be used carelessly or imprecisely. My contention is that obscenity is real, is necessary as an expression, a safety valve against the almost intolerable pressures and strains of relationship between men and women, and not only between men and women but between any human being and his unmanageable world. If we distort, warp, abuse this language which is the seamy side of the noble language of religion and love, indeed the necessary expression of insult and revenge towards the insoluble mystery of life, which causes us such cureless suffering, what have we left for words to express the luxury of obscenity which, for an enormous majority of men, is one of the pleasures of the sexual act.

I do not object, then, to D. H. Lawrence's obscenity, but to his misuse and perversion of it, his wrongheaded denial of its true nature and meaning. Instead of writing straight healthy obscenity, he makes it sickly sentimental, embarrassingly so, and I find that obscene sentimentality is as hard to bear as any other kind. I object to this sickly attempt to purify and canonize obscenity, to castrate the roaring boy Ribaldry, to take the low comedy out of sex. We cannot and should not try to hallow these words because they are not hallowed and were not meant to be. The attempt

to make pure, tender, sensitive washed-in-the-blood-of-the-lamb words out of words whose whole purpose, function, meaning in our language is meant to be exactly the opposite, is sentimentality and of a very low order. Our language is rich and full, and I dare say there is a word to express every shade of meaning and feeling a human being is capable of, if we are not too lazy to look for it, or try to substitute one word for another, such as calling a nasty word—meant to be nasty, we need it that way—"pure," and a pure word "nasty." This is an unpardonable tampering with meanings, and I think it comes of a very deepgrained fear of sex itself in Lawrence; he was never easy on that subject, could not come to terms with it for anything. Perhaps it was a long hang-over from his childish Chapel piety, a violent revulsion from the inane gibberish of some of the hymns. He wrote once with deep tenderness about his early Chapel memories, and said that the word "Galilee" had magic for him, and his favorite hymn was this:

Each little dove, and sighing bough,
That makes the eve so dear to me
Has something far diviner now,
That takes me back to Galilee.

Oh Galilee, sweet Galilee,
Where Jesus loved so well to be
Oh Galilee, Sweet Galilee,
Come sing again thy songs to me.

His first encounter with dirty words must have brought a shocking sense of guilt, especially as they no doubt gave him great pleasure; and to the end of his life he was engaged in the hopeless attempt to wash away that sense of guilt by denying the reality of its cause. He never arrived at the sunny truth so fearlessly acknowledged by Yeats, that "Love has pitched his mansion in the place of excrement," but Yeats had already learned long before that Love has many mansions, and only one of them is pitched there; a very important one that should be lived in very boldly and in hot blood in its right seasons; but to deny its nature is to vulgarize it indeed. My own position is this, that anything at all a man and woman wish to do or say in their sexual relations, in love-making, or call it what you please, is exactly their own business and nobody else's. But let them keep it to themselves unless they wish to appear ridiculous. If they need the violent stimulation of nasty

acts, vile words, pornographic pictures or even low music—there is a Negro trumpeter who blows, it is said, a famous aphrodisiac noise—I think it is a pity that their nervous systems are so blunted they have to be jolted into pleasure like that. Sex shouldn't be such hard work, nor, as this book promises, lead to such a dull future. For nowhere in the sad history can you see anything but a long dull grey monotonous chain of days, lighted now and then by a sexual bout. I can't hear any music, or the voices of friends; there is no wine or food, no sleep or refreshment, no rest and no quiet—no love. I remember then that all this is the fevered day dream of a dying man sitting under his umbrella pines in Italy. As for his sexual fantasies—for Lawrence is a Romantic turned wrong side out, and like Swift's recently flayed woman, it does alter his appearance for the worse—they are all easy and dreamlike, not subject to interruptions and interferences, a mixture of morning dew and mingled body-secretions, a boy imagining a female partner who is nothing but one yielding, faceless, voiceless organ of consent.

An organ, and he finally bestows on those quarters his accolade of approval in the language and tone of one praising a specially succulent scrap of glandular meat fresh from the butcher's. "Tha's a tasty bit of tripe, th'art," he says in effect, if not in just those words. And adds (these are his real words), "Tha'rt real, even a bit of a bitch." Climbing onto his lap, she confirms his diagnosis by whispering, "Kiss me!"

Mr. Schorer in his preface hails the work as "a great hymn to true marriage." That it is not, above all. No matter what the protagonists think they are up to, this is the story of an affair, and a thoroughly disreputable one, based on the treachery of a woman to her husband who has been made impotent by wounds received in the war; and by the mean trickery of a man of low origins trying to prove he is as good as the next man. Mr. Schorer also accepts and elucidates for us Lawrence's favorite, most pathetic fallacy. He writes:

The pathos of Lawrence's novel arises from the tragedy of modern society. What is tragic is that we cannot feel our tragedy. We have grown slowly into a confusion of these terms, these two forms of power, and in confusing them we

have left almost no room for the free creative functions of the man or woman who, lucky soul, possesses "integrity of self." The force of this novel probably lies in the degree of intensity with which his indictment of the world and the consequent solitude of his lovers suggest such larger meanings.

If Mr. Schorer means to say—he sometimes expresses himself a little cloudily—that the modern industrial world, Lawrence's pet nightmare, has destroyed, among a number of other things, some ancient harmony once existing between the sexes, which Lawrence proposes to restore by using short words during the sexual act, I must simply remind him that all history is against this theory. The world itself, as well as the relationship between men and women, has not "grown into confusion." We have never had anything else, or anything much better; all human life since recorded time has been a terrible struggle from confusion to confusion to more confusion, and Lawrence, aided by his small but vociferous congregation—for there remains in his doctrine and manner the style of the parochial messiah, the chapel-preacher's threats and cajolements—has done nothing but add his own particular mystification to the subject.

One trouble with him, always, and it shows more plainly than ever in this book, is that he wanted to play all the roles, be everybody and everywhere at once. He wishes to be the godhead in his dreary rigmaroles of primitive religion, but to be the passive female, too. Until he tires of it. Mr. Schorer quotes a passage from a letter Lawrence wrote to some one when his feelings were changing. "The leader-cum-follower relationship is a bore," he decided, "and the new relationship will be some sort of tenderness, sensitive, between men and men, and between men and women." He gets a good deal of himself into these few words. First, when he is tired of the game he has invented and taught as a religion, everybody must drop it. Second, he seems not to have observed that tenderness is not a new relationship between persons who love one another. Third, he said between men and men, and men and women, but he did not say between women and women, for his view of women is utterly baleful—he has expressed it ferociously over and over; women must be kept apart, for they contaminate each other. They are to be redeemed one at a time

through the sexual offices of a man, who seems to have no other function in their lives, nor they in his. One of the great enlightenments of Lady Chatterley, after her experiences of the sentimental obscenities of her Gamekeeper, is to see other women clearly, women sexually less lucky than she, and to realize that they are horrible! She can't get away from them fast enough, and back to the embraces of her fancy man, who, to give him his due, runs through quite a varied repertory of styles and moods in his love-making; and yet—and yet—

True marriage? Love, even? It seems a very sad, shabby sort of thing to have to settle for, poor woman. She deserves anything she gets, really, but her just deserts are none of our affair. Her fate interests us as a kind of curiosity. It is true that her youth was robbed by her husband's being wounded in the war; I think he was pretty badly robbed too, but no one seems to feel sorry for him. He is shown up as having very dull ideas with conversation to match, but he is not any duller than the Gamekeeper, who forgets that the Lady's aristocratic husband wasn't born impotent, as Lawrence insists (through his dubious hero) that all upper-class men were. At about this point the confusion of ideas and feelings becomes nearly complete. It would take another book to thread out and analyze the contradictions and blind alleys into which the reader is led.

Huizinga, in his book, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, tells of the erotic religious visions of a late medieval monk and adds: "The description of his numerous visions is characterized at the same time by an excess of sexual imagination and by the absence of all genuine emotion." Lawrence used to preach frantically that people must get sex out of their heads and back where it belonged; and never learned that sex has many mansions in every part of the body and must be given freedom to run easily in the blood and the nerves and the cells, adding its glow of life to everything it touches. And the solemn God's-earnestness of these awful little love scenes seems suddenly heart-breaking—that a man of such gifts could live so long and learn no more about love than that!

Cecil D. Eby

FAULKNER AND THE SOUTHWESTERN HUMORISTS

Scattered throughout the newspapers and almanacs of the Old South from Virginia to Texas is a large body of miscellaneous sketches, anecdotes, and tales written by amateurs who in the first half of the nineteenth century rejected the prevailing romantic tradition of American literature in order to depict native scenes in a realistic manner of their own. Their work was at first isolated and seemingly destined to remain in the localities where it was written, but with the establishment of William T. Porter's sporting weekly, *The Spirit of the Times*, a medium was found by which these outbursts of local color could reach a national public. The heyday of this regionalistic movement coincided with the rise of American nationalism between 1830 and 1860. By the late eighteen-forties popular demand was such that Porter compiled two anthologies of sketches taken from his journal, *A Quarter Race in Kentucky* (1846) and *The Big Bear of Arkansas* (1848). Both were widely circulated in inexpensive paper-back editions, and with their publication the literary movement now designated as that of the Southwestern humorists came of age.

Because these early regionalists preferred to entertain rather than to uplift, their work fell outside the main current of American literature, particularly that of New England. And because their writings were not hedged about by the decorous standards set by the "genteel" magazines, they were in an excellent position to describe the brazen "flush times" of the frontier without evasion or squeamishness. Their tall tales, bizarre characters, incongruous comparisons, brutal incidents, and earthy realism resemble subjects and techniques used by twentieth-century writers but

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not by those of the nineteenth. No matter how much each writer differed from his fellows, he was like them in sharing a common objective—the presentation of a native region in such a way that it would differ from all other regions. “Can you top this?” seemed to be the query of each writer submitting copy to the *Spirit*, and there were always dozens of others who thought they could. Local rivalry between the regions was keen; differences were far more important than similarities. A hunter describing his forty-pound wild turkey felt compelled to add: “Happened in Arkansaw, the creation state, where the *sile* runs down to the centre of ‘arth.” The emphasis upon not only the deed but also the place where it happened was of great importance for the success of the tale. For in the Southwest a man from the next county was a stranger, one from the next state was a foreigner, and one from north of the Ohio was an inhabitant of a different celestial world.

It is as provincial recorders of social history rather than as comic artists that the Southwestern humorists resemble William Faulkner. Although a hundred years separate their respective work, their provincial orientation is nearly the same. By comparison with most other sections of the United States, the Southwest is relatively static and unchanged. Except in the cities, conditions and scenes described by the humorists persist still, and the up-country domain of the piny-woods and the red-neck in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet* would still be recognizable to a resurrected Joseph G. Baldwin or a Johnson Hooper. The backwoods opportunism of Yoknapatawpha County is but a later version of Baldwin's *Flush Times in Alabama and Mississippi* (1853); Flem Snopes is cut from the same cloth as Simon Suggs. This is not to say that Faulkner overtly returned to the tradition of the regionalists but that he paralleled them in both technique and material largely because the conditions of life remained basically the same in the Southwest.

The most pronounced characteristic of the Southwesterner has been and is his accentuated individualism, a result of the anarchy in any frontier culture and the necessity for self-reliance. Where “one man is as good as another, or a damned sight better” there was an aversion to any authority beyond that which a man could enforce by his fists or his cunning. This dynamic, often aggressive,

individualism is the key to the "half-horse, half-alligator" boasts of the backwoods, which were used in the plays, ballads, and sketches of the period. To the flatboatman or hunter thumping his chest, crowing like a rooster, and neighing like a horse, government was a meaningless abstraction, at best a distant nuisance; when government infringed upon his personal liberty, it was meddling. Coercion by a central authority whether local or national, was inadvisable and often impossible. The frontiersman asked for nothing he could not obtain for himself, and at the same time expected to contribute nothing. The intrusion of a governmental agent into private affairs is the subject of many sketches, among them Johnson Hooper's "Taking the Census." The census-taker was an object of derision and the victim of abuse. He was taunted, laughed at, and threatened. "Damn him," says one citizen, "he'll be after the *taxes* soon." Even William Tappan Thompson's Major Jones, one of the most docile and mild-mannered characters in Southwestern literature, shows his layer of adamant when the subject of governmental interference (personified to the Southerner by the North) is raised. He says, "There's a great deal of ignorance and prejudice at the North, especially in matters that don't consarn their own interests; but it is hoped they will some day larn to mind their own business." Preserving inviolate an individual way of life was the concern of most regionalists in the early period, and Faulkner has reflected this attitude in our time. In his *Intruder in the Dust* we are told of Beat Four, where the natives made their stronghold against the county and the federal government, "where peace officers from town didn't go unless they were sent for." In the same novel Faulkner enlarges the scope and implications of this autonomy to include the entire South. Individualism becomes intrenched in a sectional alignment against encroaching federal authority when he says, "We are defending our homogeneity from a federal government to which in simple desperation the rest of the country has had to surrender voluntarily more and more of its personal and private liberty."

One expects, and finds, among the regionalists a reflection of the widening breach between North and South during the decade preceding the Civil War. The figure of the Yankee crystallized in the Southern mind as a mutation somewhere between the devil

and a machine. Yankees, says Sut Lovingood, "were hatched in the frosty rocks where nutmegs are made outen maple . . . and the men invents rat-traps, man-traps, and new-fangled doctrines for the aid of the Devil." When Sut is asked by a listener if a villain under discussion is a Negro, he replies, "Worse nor that. He were a mighty mean Yankee razor-grinder." This antipathy was shared by other regionalists, who put the Yankee along with the sheriff on their lists of despicable humanity. The conviction grew that the Northerner and the Southerner were representatives of two wholly different breeds of mankind, and this idea gained ground after the Civil War. Ratliff, Faulkner's spokesman in *The Hamlet*, tells how a goat ranch develops under the management of each. The Southerner would start his farm when he had so many extra goats that he did not know what else to do with them; the Northerner, however, would start neither with goats nor even a piece of land: "He starts off with a piece of paper and pencil and measures it all down setting in the library." In Ratliff's summary there is a recognition that the Northern way is not only more efficient but also inevitable. Such planning, pondering, and execution are the means by which the agrarian culture of the South will be destroyed, for through it the land becomes little more than exploitable property.

Closely related to the Southerner's individualism was his pride, his sense of personal honor and dignity. The gentry had their duels and the common folk their fights, but the cause was usually the same—a violation of the subtle rules which governed personal relationships. Recourse to legal aid to redress a wrong was often a confession of cowardice, for the Southerner felt a man should fight his own battles. Porter reprinted the story of a courthouse "major" who dropped a suit for assault when he discovered that "whipped" would be on his record. "Whipped, Sir?" he exclaims, "I'd rather be fined five hundred dollars than have *that* on the record; it wasn't done! *Angels* couldn't whip me!" One of the fiercest fights in the annals of the Southwest is that between Bob Durham and Billy Stallions. It is brought about by a minor breach of etiquette on the part of Mrs. Stallions. Yet Longstreet shows that no enmity existed between the combatants either before or after the fight. Similarly John S. Robb noted that nothing confirmed mutual respect more than did a fight; one of his characters

says, "The lickin' I gin Tom Sellers that spring has made us good friends ever since." The fight, like the quarter race or the hunt, was accepted as a competitive sport, an affirmation of manhood. Violent personalized action, detached from vindictiveness or meanness, was a favorite subject of the regionalists, and it explains in part the themes of violence found in the novels of Faulkner. The masculine aggressiveness of the Sartoris twins was in keeping with the frontier tradition, but physical prowess and courage also had responsibilities. As Bayard Sartoris says, "Taught us in ground-school never seduce a fool nor hit a cripple." There was also a distinction between being defeated and being whipped; the first was honorable. After the Civil War the South admitted that it had suffered a defeat through its army but not through its individual soldiers. The favorite saying, "We wore ourselves out lickin' the North," was the Southerner's way of saying that man for man he had won the war. Over and over Wash Jones says to Sutpen in *Absalom! Absalom!*, "Well, Kernel, they kilt us but they ain't whupped us yit, air they?" His distinction is that of the true Southwesterner, defeated but not whipped. The Northerner, convinced as he so often was that institutions rather than individuals determined human history, often failed to understand this distinction. The world of fists, threats, and knives was familiar to both the regionalists and to Faulkner, and the accompanying violence was justified by the obligation in each man to defend his honor.

Perhaps more than any other novel by Faulkner, *The Hamlet* conforms to the folk tradition utilized by the early regionalists. To examine the setting, the characters, and the episodes of this novel and to place them beside similar ones used by the regionalists is to see how clearly Faulkner falls within the older tradition of the Southwest. This is not to imply that he failed to transcend the provincial boundaries of his predecessors nor to conclude that he borrowed from them deliberately but to show that he described a society which has changed very little since the days of Joseph G. Baldwin or Johnson Hooper.

In this novel Faulkner restricts the setting to Frenchman's Bend, an isolated rural section inhabited by the poor-white. Although the time is about 1890, it could well be 1840 or 1940, for

with the exception of a cotton gin and the sewing machine there is nothing which depends upon technological orientation within a particular period. Space and time are static; an ideal condition is established for making comparisons between eras. At the outset it should be emphasized that Southern literature before the Civil War had split into two well-defined traditions: there was the genteel literature reflecting the upper classes of Southern society, exemplified by the novels of Augusta Evans Wilson, and there was the popular literature of the middle and lower classes, exemplified by the sketches of the humorists. *The Hamlet* treats only the second area. Here is no world of plantation by moonlight or figures dancing upon the lawns beneath the magnolias, but the region of pine wastes, the general store, cow pastures, and overalls—the exclusive province of every Southwestern regionalist. There is a manor house in the novel, but it has been long abandoned by its original owners; the single chair on the sagging gallery is a hand-cut barrel. The Bend is autonomous, and Faulkner's description could serve equally well for *Georgia Scenes* or *Adventures of Simon Suggs*: "Federal officers went into the country and vanished. . . . They supported their own churches and schools, and were their own courts, judges, and executioners." No Negroes, reminders of the aristocratic South with its masters and slaves, appear in the novel, just as they do not appear in the sketches of the pre-war regionalists.

The characters in *The Hamlet* fall into categories which had been developed by the humorists. Like Longstreet's backwoods professor, Labove must wage a physical combat for supremacy in his classroom. Hoake McCurran, Eula's beau, is a re-creation of the familiar gun-strapping, violence-loving individualist of half a century before. The unscrupulous rise to power of Flem Snopes recalls the similar rise of Simon Suggs. Suggs' motto, "it is good be be shifty in a new country," would have served as well for Flem. Both men through a smooth, even-tempered facility are able to manipulate the strings in unstable societies where neither law nor conscience are strong curbs (both, it should be noted, begin as clerks in general stores). Eula Varner is not the swooning female of the sentimental Southern novel, nor is she the embodiment of decadent genteel womankind. She is instead a raw physical female,

full grown at eight, who "reached and passed puberty in the foetus." The emphasis upon corporeal substance rather than ethereal intangibles was also characteristic of descriptions of the female of the earlier humorists. George W. Harris's characterization of Sicily Burns would have been offensive to a female reader of the eighteen-fifties, but its rude frankness delighted his masculine audience. Sicily "loved kissin', rasslin, and boiled cabbage; hated tight clothes, hot weather, and circuit riders . . . didn't believe in corsets, fleas, pianos, nor the the fashion plates." Similarly John S. Robb's description of Sally Spillman shows the frontier taste in females: "she stuck out all over jest far enough without cushinin." Nothing could be further from the bloodless stereotype of femininity which marked the "genteel" Southern novel prior to the Civil War.

Even Ratliff, whose detachment permits him a greater insight into the social disorder of Frenchman's Bend, suggests the function of the raconteur in the early sketches—the man of greater intellect through whom the tale is conveyed to the reader and by whom characters are related to moral issues. Pat Stamper, the horse trader, "a legend, even though still alive," is familiar to readers of many early sketches treating the horse swap. Faulkner's Uncle Dick the wizard, who has a spurious occult power, is one of a long line of backwoods seers who stretch back to Longstreet's Uncle Tommy, the ambiguous oracle of the Stallions-Durham fight. And the victims of Flem Snopes' exploitation, whether poor and honest like Henry Armstid or poor and mean like "Minx" Snopes, are cousins to the dupes described in nearly every sketch of the regionalists. The whole gallery of portraits in *The Hamlet* parallels those of the early humorists, and the characters move in the same world of unchanging provincial isolation.

In its structure *The Hamlet* is episodic, digressive, and without the unity of most Faulkner novels. T. Y. Greet, who has written the most detailed article concerning the novel's structure, has confessed that its four books have "rather sharply contrasting notes." Robert Penn Warren premises that the structure depends upon "an intricate patterning of contrasts," which admits that the diversity of themes and characters is troublesome for a critic seeking singleness of design. It seems to me that the episodic nature of

the book is explained by Faulkner's intention, which was not to create a novel about a theme but to impose a theme upon a novel. This is to say that the author's purpose was to present the microcosm of Frenchman's Bend in all its sociological ambivalence rather than to manipulate his scenes toward the illustration of a single idea or theme. While the most pervasive theme is the rise of Flem Snopes from barnburner to backwoods tycoon, most of the novel treats incidents irrelevant to this. Because the individual episodes are so much more important than totality of structure, the novel falls within the tradition of the Southwestern humorists, who recorded dissimilar anecdotes, tall tales, and characterizations. *The Hamlet* is the chronicle of a society not a man; the real protagonist is not Ratliff, Flem, or any other human character but Frenchman's Bend itself. The novel contains folk scenes which run the gamut from horse-swaps to stock-diddling, from the prophecies of the village wizard to the anecdotes of the loafers at the country store. Just as for Longstreet the customs of the native Georgians were of greatest importance, so for Faulkner was the culture of the Mississippians. It is as if Faulkner tried to document, before it vanished forever, the social history of a community isolated from the powerful leveling forces of twentieth-century America. Each of the Southwestern humorists was concerned with a similar objective.

Without doubt *The Hamlet* transcends the tradition of the humorists, for Faulkner is interested not only in entertainment but also in ideas. In the rise of Flem we see the rise of a new South with its social and moral changes. Ratliff alone resists Flem, but in the resulting conflict he fails and the weak are exploited. No such ideological purposes characterized the work of any Southwestern humorist, not even that of Johnson Hooper or Joseph Glover Baldwin, the two most concerned with indirect protest. Although both were satirists, they were more interested in transcribing the flavor of the frontier than in questioning its values. But though Faulkner's purpose is more concerned with moral issues, his materials are the same. Through his use of local incidents, native characters, and up-country setting, he produced a folk epic. He created a novel in which the continuity with the frontier tradition was re-established just as in his other novels he had worked

within the "genteel" tradition of Southern literature. None of his work is more Southern than *The Hamlet*, but its South is the less familiar wasteland of the early regionalists rather than the well-known plantation settings of the romantic novelists.



The new *Shenandoah* medallion, reproduced above, was the winning entry in a competition conducted by the magazine for a distinctive symbol to mark its publications. The designer is JOHN K. McMURRAY, a senior at Washington and Lee and a major in Fine Arts.

POETRY

James I. Greene

Mementos on the Wall

I

All the glorious faces have gone,
Left their mementos on the wall,
Signed goodbye to one and all.

The Tiger's claws are sharp tonight;
He climbs upon the shrunken heads;
Violent eyes of green
Pierce the darkened room.

II

In the morning:
Sir Alfred checks to see
That everything appears intact,
So it is—
Or seems to be.

Bareheaded they walk,
Leaden shoes weigh down the floor,
Sweat gathers on their palms.

He says: Can Art be imitation?
Or imitation, Art?
They say: What time is it now?
Or is now the time?

JAMES I. GREENE is a senior and candidate for Honors in English at Washington and Lee. His poems received one of the Mahan Awards in Creative writing at Washington and Lee in 1958-59.

How taut the phrases sound
On short and frozen tongues:
Simple and precise,
Rigid, but nice.

The animals dressed in tweed
Rise with relief,
Stretch once and leave.

Looking for the bones of affirmation,
They cannot hope to find more
Than a line or two of broken imagery.

III

The lithe, orange tiger
Digs claws into dark,
Springs upon one sleeping,
Dares to puncture life.

All the faces hang distorted
While a single, brutal act
Rips through infirm artifact.

James I. Greene

The Humid Air

Remember
How bold horns
Sounded,
Screaming an infinity
Of dissonance.
Minds touched
With fervor
Ran
In supersaturated air,
Letting inclinations
Bound ahead.

Unseen humidity
Squeezed their minds,
Intoxicated
With self-assertion.

Lost in the sun,
Where youth
Dries into age,
They fell exhausted.

Once we envied
Their prolific,
Wordy innovations,
Diagrammed with answers.

Leonard Nathan

The Word

When I remember first it rhymed with breath,
And dropped like a lid on wooden conversation.
It whited faces gathered to be counted,
And told the absence of some near relation.

When I remember second, O what a word
To mouth and threaten with, till you were kissed
Off eastward with a million kissed-off men,
Casualties of love; but what's a list?

And later, no word at all, no rhetoric
Of absence, love, no counter for the dying
To close the eyes on such a solid thing:
The word is flesh and there's an end to lying.

LEONARD NATHAN's poetry has appeared in many periodicals, including *Poetry and Commentary*. His first volume of verse, *Western Reaches*, was published in 1958. He lives in Modesto, California.

Albert Sweet

Eroica

Red autumn is an antique deity;
A slow unrest pales his temples, wrinkling
The massed frames of his reflections, his high
Designs at fixing every odyssey.
Is he, after all, romanticizing
Spring? when the dullest butterfly divines
The green revelry, full of sense in the hedge
Of rain slanting as the quick wind sings.
Still among the leaves the old owl broods;
The wind nods and wakes by a low river,
And rudely grown, like Hephaestos, puzzles
The reason he must fashion heroes' chains.
The brave leaves bend, and like old kings descend
To school themselves in the wind's dominion.

ALBERT SWEET is working toward a doctorate in philosophy at Emory University and is teaching at Georgia State College.

R. G. Vliet

Not So Always in Clover

to buckwheat so fluent a lover
so successful at honey as that other
the bee nor like a bumble
be so mountainously
self-arrived saint-solitary
not so humble,
but in fact a little blazes
you yellowjackets.
I know you in summer:
sting-happy peevish with sun
hotspurs petty furies: I've seen
you craze into death a caterpillar
fallen to your botch of a paper
nest from where it had spun
and a pup cut hell's capers
for doggy curiosity
yes even you damned beasts: me:
I've held my ankle swollen three
days of your reflected rage.

It is in september you get strange,
when the year has taken
winesap mcintosh and baldwin
and hustles them down. Some
whole but most in slush, rotten
or at a brown bruise
and that is when you lose
rage: as if you had forgotten

R. G. VLIET, of Meadville, Pennsylvania, has published poetry in *Accent*, the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and the *Saturday Review*, and a short story in the *Western Review*.

summer or summer rolled to ripen
in those apples into love. Then
of a morning full
with sweet vinegar smell
you are come in still battalions
to booze quietly, beasts
fixed in the cider music of the feast
pulsing tamely in pulps so even
the most strange stranger
can touch wing hooked-high abdomen
in no danger.

But then I suppose were
I so filled with sting
I would be meek to bite
into this round souring
earth and it turn out sweet.

BOOK REVIEWS

American Literature and Christian Doctrine. RANDALL STEWART.
Louisiana State University Press. 1958.

In this little book Mr. Stewart, who is Chairman of the English Department at Vanderbilt University, argues the thesis—more often implied than stated—that the best in American writing is rooted in the assumptions of Christian orthodoxy. (Mr. Stewart, of course, means Protestant orthodoxy since, as he observes, Roman Catholicism has not made itself felt until recently as a strong force in American literature.) Such a thesis is bound to encounter vociferous opposition in many quarters, not the least of which is the academic world itself, which has all too often held that what was most “American”—and therefore best—in our literature was its “liberalism” (often called “idealism”) both in politics and theology. Several generations of critics and college professors have proclaimed Jefferson and Franklin as the Founding Fathers of the American Zion and Emerson and Whitman as its great priestly prophets, but they have tended to look deprecatingly at Jonathan Edwards as a clinical study in the morbidity to which the “pessimistic” assumptions of Calvinism must inevitably lead. Hawthorne they have tolerated largely, one suspects, because he occasionally demonstrates the bigotry into which strong Christian convictions are liable to degenerate; and Emily Dickinson they have delighted in as a pert little girl snuggling up close to God and occasionally giving His long gray beard a sharp tweak.

It would be pointless, as well as impertinent, to recapitulate further along these lines. For now the tables are turned. In a revitalized and growing American conservatism, serious questions are being raised about the validity of Jeffersonian egalitarianism and Franklin’s materialistic prudence, which often seems to verge on calculation. The nineteenth-century Hawthorne and Melville and the twentieth-century Faulkner and Hemingway—writers whom Mr. Stewart finds essentially “orthodox”—are greatly admired. There is a growing distrust of the liberal doctrines of human perfectibility and inevitable progress, which at present seems

to hold out more promise of an Apocalypse than an Earthly Paradise, and an increasing willingness to see man as a creature torn between the alternatives of good and evil, Heaven and Hell. In short, there seems to be an increasing willingness on the part of many—and, in particular, the “intellectuals”—to entertain seriously the fundamental Christian doctrine of Original Sin.

For these reasons one is almost tempted to say that Mr. Stewart's book has appeared in the very fullness of time. And he argues his case so gracefully and so learnedly—despite the modest disclaimer in the preface—that his book, which is, as he admits, more provocative than definitive, may well set off a systematic reappraisal of the “American” literary tradition. The three great American heresies which he sets himself to discredit are: (1) the eighteenth-century “rationalism” of Jefferson, Paine, and Franklin; (2) “the romantic deification of man, as proclaimed by Emerson and Whitman”; and (3) the naturalistic heresy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in which “man becomes the mechanical product of the forces of heredity and environment.” And all three of these heresies have in common a denial of the fundamental Christian doctrine of Original Sin.

The rationalistic heresy of the eighteenth century, which counted as its spiritual heirs the nineteenth-century Unitarians, Mr. Stewart feels, has been considerably discredited by two world wars, if nothing else. “Reason” alone will not save us, though there still persists, on the part of many Americans, a stalwart faith in science and “gadgets.” But under the tutelage of that arch-gadgeteer, Dr. Franklin, we seem well on the road to producing that Ultimate Gadget which will annihilate us all. Indeed, if we may quote—with some license—from James Thurber's *Fables For Our Times*, the devotees of that great American “saint,” Poor Richard, might well reflect that there may be instances in which early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and dead. Significantly, Mr. Stewart calls on a modern writer to refute the Jeffersonian denial of Original Sin, when he cites Robert Penn Warren's long poem, *Brother to Dragons*, in which Jefferson's own nephews brutally murder a Negro slave. Warren supposes that Jefferson, who never commented on the historical fact of the murder, must have been horrified at the deed. Where then was

his belief in man's innate goodness and the equality of all men? Warren, it may be noted, has Jefferson admit the inadequacy of his views, in commenting on the murder: "I . . . was unprepared for the nature of the world," he has Jefferson say.

The second great heresy which Mr. Stewart points to is the Emersonian "romantic" heresy. Taking a cue from T. E. Hulme, who defined romantics as all who reject the doctrine of Original Sin, Mr. Stewart goes on to point out the absence of such doctrine in Emerson, who celebrated the divinity of man and indeed often seemed to confuse man with God. For Emerson, evil was merely the absence of good and the Devil simply did not exist. (The orthodox Christian may be tempted here to reflect on C. S. Lewis' comment that the cleverest of the Devil's many wiles is to persuade us that he does not exist.) The second Emersonian doctrine—and the inevitable corollary of the first heresy—is the doctrine of self-reliance; man must rely only on himself because—and here is the blasphemy—that self is, in a sense, God. There is no doubt that the Emersonian individualism has become part of the American democratic gospel, and therefore it is here that Mr. Stewart is at considerable pains to refute the insinuation often made that orthodox Christianity may not be compatible with true democracy. And he takes as his text St. Paul' impassioned avowal: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." And his argument is so cogent that I shall quote him at some length.

All have sinned! It is the most democratic of propositions! And it has the advantage over some other propositions of being factually and literally true; it is beyond doubt the truest of all democratic propositions. It has the further advantage of producing an attitude, a tone, a character which would recommend the democratic idea, more winningly than in the past, to a suspicious and alien world. As between the two preambles, 'Let us humbly confess our sins unto Almighty God' and 'Let us congratulate ourselves upon our innate goodness,' the former does seem more favorable to a tolerable society and a viable world order.

It is more than possible that the Emerson heresy, rather than being really "democratic," has given aid and comfort to the arrogant leveling doctrines of socialism, which is inclined to believe that orders and degrees jar not with liberty. If, as Emerson im-

plies, each man is really divine, he will be reluctant to acknowledge any authority higher than himself. For most gods are indeed jealous gods.

In Whitman, Mr. Stewart finds the Emersonian heresy extended further—to the point of real arrogance; and then, by way of contrast, he turns briefly to Sidney Lanier and Emily Dickinson—poth poets who acknowledged the supreme necessity of suffering in human experience. But he finds the principal nineteenth-century refutation of the Emersonian heresy in Hawthorne and Melville and, finally, James, whom he appropriately calls “counter-romantics.” In *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby Dick*, Mr. Stewart sees the authors absorbed in the problems posed by the existential fact of man's sin (and its inevitable corollary death) and his consequent need for redemption. Here is no one-sided view of life but a realistic “whole” view. Man is not naturally good but naturally bad and can be redeemed only through suffering. But the choice between the alternatives of good and evil—a choice which does not even exist in the Emersonian and naturalistic heresies—still exists. And the existence of such a monomaniac as Ahab, who is truly possessed by the Devil, is but one more evidence that the diabolic operates on the same Source of energy as the saintly but perverts this energy from its proper goal. Mr. Stewart, incidentally, makes a strong case for Arthur Dimmesdale's being the tragic hero of *The Scarlet Letter*—rather than Hester Prynne's being the tragic heroine. Though we may find Hester a more “appealing,” perhaps even more “pathetic” figure, it is in Arthur that the real struggle between good and evil takes place. His is the heroic and, finally, the more “tragic” character.

The third and final heresy—the heresy of “naturalism” as exemplified in the novels of Crane, Norris, Farrell, and especially Dreiser—Mr. Stewart very wisely counters by observing that the truly admirable characters in such works are the very ones who give the lie to the assumption of naturalism—that man is simply the product of hereditary and environmental factors over which he has no control. Characters like the soldier in *The Red Badge of Courage*, who becomes a sort of hero at the end of the novel, and the mother of Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy*, who seems sustained by her faith, manage to triumph in some way

over "naturalistic determination," which, if accepted completely, denies any free choice, any triumph, or any tragedy.

Mr. Stewart makes his strongest and obviously most "timely" case in the chapter called "The Old Cost of the Human Redemption," in which, after citing the *explicit* orthodoxy of Eliot, he demonstrates the *implicit* orthodoxy in such writers as Hemingway, Faulkner, and Warren. And he is most illuminating perhaps in his reading of the orthodox implications in the work of the less ostensibly Christian writers. Hemingway, to whom many would be reluctant—if not downright mortified—to ascribe orthodoxy, insists time and again, says Mr. Stewart, on the necessity of ritualistic discipline as a means of achieving that redemption, which in one sense is death to the self and in another, life everlasting, which for Hemingway is that clean, well-lighted place in the midst of "the disorder and chaos of an evil world." And it is not blasphemous, in the case of Hemingway, to observe that his bartenders are often priests ministering to the spiritual as well as physical needs of the "communicants" at the bar. And the discipline which the typical Hemingway hero (remember, naturalism can have no heroes and in the Emerson heresy the concept is meaningless since all are heroes) must undergo in the course of the typical Hemingway "initiation" is a kind of ritual, almost a liturgical form.

It is not without point, as Mr. Stewart observes, that both Faulkner and Warren are products of the modern Southern Renaissance; for the South is the most theologically conservative section in America. (Indeed, at the end of his chapter on Puritanism, he remarks that the Puritan "center" has moved from New England to the South and concludes that "New England's loss has been the South's gain.") Both these writers are overwhelmingly aware of human imperfectibility and sin, so much so that their works are sometimes read as sociological documentations of Southern "depravity." But what they find in the South is universal; *all* have indeed sinned. And the witnesses they call include some magnificent sinners: Faulkner's Sutpen and Joe Christmas and Warren's Percy Munn and Willie Stark. And yet juxtaposed beside these are characters like Faulkner's Sam Fathers and Dilsey, who "endure" and finally "prevail." And we must remember that Warren's

heroes, even in their tragic downfall, are encompassed in a cloudy aura of celestial light.

There is so much to praise in Mr. Stewart's eloquent little book that one is reluctant to raise any objections at all. And such strictures as I make are in no wise quarrels with either his thesis or the evidence he has marshalled here; they merely are concerned to show how he might have made his argument even more persuasive than it is. At least one reviewer, I observe, has noted the absence of such a major American writer as Poe in this study; one might even infer that Mr. Stewart considered Poe as having no bearing on his thesis. And yet—this will be surprising to many—I believe Poe is, in a sense, "orthodox." No one knew better than he, it seems to me, the reality of evil in the world. Even though at times it seems to hold a morbid fascination for him, he never loses sight of its ultimately destructive effects. And "The Masque of the Red Death" is as profound a parable as Hawthorne's "The Birthmark," which Mr. Stewart cites, of the folly in man's trying to *exclude* imperfectibility from his work. One might also wish for a more extensive treatment of Mark Twain as the example *par excellence* of how a repudiation of the orthodoxy which is clearly evident (despite the denials of the "liberal" critics) in such a novel as *Huckleberry Finn* can undermine native genius and lead to such intellectually naive works as *The Mysterious Stranger*.

One might suggest, further, that Mr. Stewart has committed a strategic error in not giving the "heretics" more of their due. As Christians well know, every heresy contains a substantial portion of the truth. The heresy perhaps lies in the heretic's setting up that *portion* of the truth as the *whole* truth. The rationalists, the romantics, the naturalists—all are partly right; but, to be epigrammatic, not right enough. And to this writer, it would seem that the "literary" excellence of the great American heretics—and it is often considerable—is usually in proportion as they borrow (without being willing to pay the interest) from the spiritual capital of Christian orthodoxy.

But these are only tactical objections. In his preface, Mr. Stewart expresses a modest and pious wish for his book: "I should be happy if it should prove to be the cause, or occasion, of the writ-

ing, by way of agreement and disagreement, of treatments much more complete, authoritative, and satisfactory both for the scholar and the general reader." I will venture to say here that there is good reason to expect that Mr. Stewart's wish will be granted. But though such "treatments" may be more thorough and perhaps more "scholarly," I find it hard to believe that they will, finally, be more satisfactory—or more rewarding—than this one.

ROBERT Y. DRAKE, JR.

The Fugitives: A Critical Account. JOHN M. BRADBURY. University of North Carolina Press. 1958.

Southern Writers in the Modern World. DONALD DAVIDSON. University of Georgia Press. 1958.

Who are the best literary historians? The detached and objective, writing long after the fact, or the actual participants in a literary movement? Which is the more valuable: Henry James's *Autobiography* or the painstaking volumes of Edel and Dupee? A similar question might be asked concerning Donald Davidson's *Southern Writers in the Modern World* and John M. Bradbury's *The Fugitives*. Both are essentially critical histories of the Fugitive movement; but they differ radically in breadth of treatment, in fineness of sensibility, and in what, for want of a better word, I can only call authority. These differences, I am persuaded, stem from one simple fact: Davidson knows whereof he writes, he was himself a Fugitive; Bradbury was not.

Objectivity is a great virtue, to be sure; so is historical detachment, but neither is instinct with life. The particular virtue of Davidson's account lies in its fidelity to the precise form and pressure of the era, so recent and so distant, which gave birth to the Fugitive movement. Here is the Nashville of the twenties and thirties, described by one who knew that town and was at the

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center of Vanderbilt's intellectual life. Here are Ransom, Tate, Lytle, very much themselves, engaged in literary argument, poetic creation, and the careful nurture of genius. Davidson's book is biased, even idiosyncratic; his style is personal, at once urbane and informal, as befits a lecturer and great teacher. Above all else, *Southern Writers in the Modern World* is a living account of a great literary movement.

I wish as much could be said for Mr. Bradbury's effort; but his book, for all its carefully displayed critical apparatus, bears the ponderous stamp of *Wissenschaft*. It is almost too much to be borne, and such an approach might well have been postponed until after the death of Mr. Bradbury's Fugitives, most of them still happily active and very much alive. Critical biography is a treacherous discipline, and it is never so treacherous as when the biographer does not enjoy the full confidence of his subjects. Perhaps Mr. Bradbury did not seek that confidence, for he claims to have confined himself almost exclusively to the published records of their lives. But even this seems to me an abdication of responsibility; and here, if nowhere else, Mr. Davidson has an inestimable advantage. He belongs to the club, he was a charter member.

Still, *The Fugitives* has much in its favor. The book is systematic in presentation and broad in scope. It undertakes to survey the origins of the Nashville movement, and it treats of each major writer under separate headings: as poet, critic, or writer of fiction. Thus Tate and Ransom are considered first as poets, then as critics, and their influence and example are assessed at some length. Mr. Bradbury also furnishes us with an interesting account of what may best be called the social background to the Fugitive movement; and he traces the inception, publication, and lamented death of the group's own review, *The Fugitive*. The book concludes with a very useful appendix on the minor writers affiliated with the movement, though here I must disagree with Bradbury's rather slighting view of Andrew Nelson Lytle—an excellent writer if perhaps a derivative one. The vagaries of reputation are notorious, and Lytle, quite simply, has yet to enjoy the popularity he deserves.

There is, then a great deal of information in the book: dates

of publication, titles, influences and friendships recounted. There are conventional, discreet, and perfectly safe critical judgments. No one will go astray with Mr. Bradbury, but few will discover anything new, much less exciting. Perhaps I am unfair, but history, even literary history, is a sort of death, and there's no use hastening toward the grave. Both books are necessary, both have their value; but Mr. Davidson's, for all its brevity, is the more vital, the more genuinely interesting and valuable. Who would be so foolish as to trade the *Goncourt Journals* for a whole shelf of circumspect criticism and mere literary history?

RANDOLPH M. BULGIN

Four Stories. SIGRID UNDET. Translated from the Norwegian by Naomi Walford. Alfred A. Knopf. 1959.

Tolstoy, in a preface that he contributed in 1902 for an edition of von Polne's novel *Der Büttnerbauer*, speaks of those many admirable works "which are drowned in the sea of printed rubbish, while senseless, insignificant, and even simply nasty literary productions are discussed from every aspect, invariably praised, and sold by millions of copies." Thus baldly repeated, the observation sounds superficial enough, romanticized enough, sentimentalized enough; yet it possesses, at the same time, a certain bright core of truth, as does almost everything else that Tolstoy ever wrote. And I suspect that there is a sense by which these words of Tolstoy's can provide a sort of scriptural text for the present volume and for the fortunes that it doubtless will encounter. These four long stories by the 1928 Nobel Prize Winner, Sigrid Undet, do not, probably, make a really great book; but they make a very fine and distinctly worthwhile one, and it seems a marked pity that they are destined, in all likelihood, to attract no more audience than a few thousand persons who will buy them and the few thousand others who may chance upon them in libraries.

Each of the stories offered here is set in Norway, and each of

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them is dedicated, at its center, to illuminating a quite ordinary human figure (a woman in three instances, an old man in the fourth) who has somehow been quietly and undramatically drained dry by life. The portraits of these people are, without exception, memorable. "Miss Smith-Tellefsen" concerns the rejected love of an unattractive, middle-aged governess for her employer. "Selma Broter" renders the contrast between the fresh beauty of youth and the sorrows and dryness of old age, by describing the abortive love of a lonely spinster for a younger man. In "Thjodolf" we are made privy to the heartbreaks that ensue when an unloved married woman adopts a sickly child. "Simonsen" shows the mistreatment of a pathetic, aged clerk by his son and his daughter-in-law.

The author is far too wise to blame either society or other individuals for the bleak lot of her humble, unfulfilled central characters; nor (and in this she is wiser still) does she blame the characters themselves. The machinery behind the griefs and the cruelties of existence appears, in each of these stories, as so complex a construct that one can not pierce through to the springs within the springs. The protagonists merely submit to their pain and disappointment—with, for the most part, a meekness something akin to that of the abused horses in Dostoyevsky's novels.

The writing gathered here was done comparatively early in the creative career of its author, but it has dated only a little. In each piece it is calmly and firmly crafted, emotion and irony being allowed—as with a Bergman-directed film, for example, or the stories and plays of the late-period Chekhov—to work themselves out from the situation itself, rather than being directly announced. There is present a great deal of stylistic beauty, too, for Miss Undset's artistic sense makes her pages far more than slices of life: in fact, reading these deeply moving tragedies (for such they are) consecutively, one receives something of the same experience that he might feel, in music, in listening to four sad, dark-hued adagios, carried mainly by the violas and the celli.

In brief, this is perhaps such a book as Tolstoy—at least insofar as we can piece together the vision that emerges from his infuriating, touching, and ineluctable writings on what art ought to mean—might have approved of. And it is a book, moreover, which

ought to appeal to many other readers who seek for solidity and a muted but profound compassion—in the best meaning of that mauled word—in fiction.

ROBERT L. STILWELL

ROBERT L. STILWELL teaches English at Ohio State University in Columbus. His articles and reviews have appeared in numerous quarterlies and journals. At present he is editing an anthology of critical essays to be published for the Hawthorne centenary in 1964.

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